DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 383 921 CE 069 323

TITLE	A Framework for Credit. Framework Guidelines 1. Levels, Credit Value and the Award of Credits.
INSTITUTION	Further Education Unit, London (England).
REPORT NO	FEU088; ISBN-1-85338-378-3
PUB DATE	95
NOTE	23p.; For related documents, see CE 069 322-324.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Achievement; British National Curriculum; Competency Based Education; *Credits; Educational Certificates; Foreign Countries; Postsecondary Education; *Student Certification; Student Evaluation; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS	Great Britain

ABSTRACT

This document explores the rationale and technical issues underlying the proposal for a common credit framework in Great Britain. This volume, aimed at senior institutional managers, curriculum managers, and practitioners, offers advice on levels, credit value, and award of credit within the framework proposal. A list of terminology is found at the front of the publication. An introduction provides an overview of the approach used throughout the guidelines. It addresses these topics: learning outcomes, units, mechanisms for ascribing size and level to units, size and credit value, national qualifications and locally developed units, awarding credits, and aggregation of credit values. Discussed in section 2 are the following: the rationale for levels for units, numbers of levels prior to higher education, names for levels, provisional level descriptors, National Curriculum Key Stages, and qualifications beyond level 3 and higher education credit accumulation and transfer systems. Section 3 focuses on ascribing level to a unit, including the use of the progressive strands. Section 4 addresses ascribing size and credit value to a unit. Focus of section 5 is on awarding credits. It covers who awards credits, criteria for awarding credits, and further development. Contains a list of nine key Further Education Unit (FEU) publications.

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 383 921

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S Brune

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

E069323

Framework Guidelines 1

Levels, credit value and the award of credits

Terminology: a quick list

Credit framework *a set of specifications for describing and comparing achievement*

Credit Accumulation and Transfer Systems (CATS)

Learning outcomes *what a learner can be expected to know, understand and do*

Assessment criteria *are more specific learning outcomes*

Unit *a coherent set of learning outcomes (of any size)*

Module *a subset of a programme of delivery (of any size)*

Size *is the extent of learning represented by the notional learning time required to achieve the unit expressed in hours*

Level *degree of complexity, learner autonomy and range of achievement of unit derived from agreed level descriptors*

Credit value *the value of a unit based on the agreed learning outcomes, size and level. It is expressed as the notional learning time divided by 30 hours. The context and purpose of the valuation should be stated.*

Credit rating *overall estimated value of whole qualification, or associated units, based on the intention of the designers rather than analysis of learning outcomes.*

Credits *based on credit value and awarded to learners for the achievement of units by appropriate awarding bodies, when appropriate assessment procedures have been followed.*

Aggregate credit value *a total value based on a combination of one or more of the following: credit values, credit ratings or actual credits awarded*

ISBN: 1 85338 378 3

Copyright © 1995 Further Education Unit

FEU registered charity number 326347

FEU088

Reproduction in whole or in part of the contents of this publication is authorised for all non-commercial purposes, provided the source is acknowledged. Copies made for such purposes should not be recorded as part of any licensed copying scheme. All rights reserved with regard to commercial reproduction of the contents.

Printed in Great Britain by Blackmore Press, Shaftesbury, Dorset

PREFACE

A Framework for Credit (1995) refines and develops the proposal first made by the Further Education Unit (FEU) in *A Basis for Credit?* (1992), that all kinds of achievement can be incorporated within a common framework through:

- describing this achievement in terms of learning outcomes;
- grouping these learning outcomes into coherent units;
- defining the level and size of these units according to a common procedure;
- agreeing a credit value for the unit based on learning outcomes, level and size.

Framework Guidelines 1 and 2 explore the rationale and technical issues underlying the proposal. They also provide advice on how to apply this approach to a variety of different applications relevant to further education (FE) colleges and other institutions.

This advice draws upon a wide range of current experience and field testing. It is primarily aimed at those undertaking credit-based activities or about to become involved.

The *Guidelines* contain some 'stand-alone' material but most practitioners will find that publications in the *Framework for Credit* series complement one another and it is useful to use them together.

A Framework for Credit provides an overview of the FEU approach and describes a vision for the future. It is aimed at policy makers as well as practitioners.

Framework Guidelines 1 is aimed at senior institutional managers, curriculum managers and practitioners, and offers advice on levels, credit value and award of credits within the framework proposal. The introduction also provides an overview of the approach used throughout the *Guidelines*.

Framework Guidelines 2 provides advice on the communication and interpretation of learning outcomes, development of quality-assured units, and the relationship between unitisation and modularisation.

Unitisation, Modularisation and Flexibility links FEU work on flexible colleges to a credit-based approaches to assessment and delivery.

The development and refinement of the framework and the advice within these publications is the outcome of the expertise and involvement of a great many individuals and organisations. It represents the outcomes of various FEU development activities, in particular **Credit Framework Technical Issues**(RP770), **FEU National Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) Network** (RP739) and developments in the Welsh modularisation and credits initiative.

A number of distinctive contributions need special recognition. From FE institutions: Gwent Tertiary College (Graham Attwell, Catherine Carr), Solihull College (Angela Myers, Lindsey Stewart) and Wirral Metropolitan College, (Maureen Hanley, Chris Coleman). From the Wales Modularisation and Credit Unit (Juliet Pierce, Sally Coady) For work on technical issues Kathryn Ecclestone (University of Sunderland), Dr Andrew Morris (City & Islington College), Professor David Robertson (Liverpool John Moore's University), Dr Richard Winter (Anglia Polytechnic University and in particular Peter Wilson (Leicestershire Open College Network.) In addition, the FEU Credit Framework Team Jim Bennett, Sally Coady, Liz Lawson, Caroline Mager, Chris Parkin and Tony Tait.

The widespread interest and references to this work such as the recent Joint Statement from all the main providers of post-16 education in this country and from Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) CATS development project is a tribute to all of those involved (whether mentioned here or not) and underlines the need for continuing development of this work and explorations of applications of credit-based approaches in the future.

Tony Tait,
FEU Development Officer,
Credit Frameworks

March 1995

CONTENTS

PREFACE 3

1 INTRODUCTION 7

Learning outcomes 7
Units 7
Mechanisms for ascribing size and level to units 8
Size and credit value 8
National qualifications and locally developed units 9
Awarding credits 11
Aggregation of credit values 11

2 FRAMEWORK LEVEL DESCRIPTORS 13

Why levels for units? 13
Number of levels pre-higher education 13
Names for levels 14
Provisional level descriptors 14
National Curriculum Key Stages 15
Beyond Level 3 and HE CATS 15

3 ASCRIBING LEVEL TO A UNIT 16

Ascribing level 16
The use of the progressive strands 16
Levels and decision making 17

4 ASCRIBING SIZE AND CREDIT VALUE TO A UNIT 18

The use of size 18

The use of notional time 18

Ascribing size to a unit 18

Agreeing the credit value 18

The choice of 30 hours 19

5 AWARD OF CREDITS 20

Who awards credits 20

Criteria for awarding credits 20

Further development 20

SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION TO *FRAMEWORK GUIDELINES* 1 AND 2

***A Framework for Credit* provides an overview of FEU's proposals for a framework for post-14 education and training. It also introduces the broad technical approach and explores the benefits the framework could offer to both learners and institutions.**

***Framework Guidelines 1 and 2* provide an elaboration of the approach and offer more detailed explanation and guidance. It results from field testing and other FEU development activity over the past two years. This introductory section aims to provide readers with a fuller explanation of the approach and to clarify FEU's advice on both current and future uses of the framework.**

Learning outcomes

Assessment and/or certification requires clarity about what learners are intended to know, understand or do as a result of a learning process, or what achievements they have to demonstrate in order to gain a specified qualification.

What learners can demonstrate they know, understand and can do are called the learning outcomes.

Units

National qualifications and other awards can be made up and sub-divided into units, where each unit consists of a coherent group of learning outcomes.

The 'value' of a unit will be given by some combination of:

- what has been achieved (the learning outcomes);
- the level of learning represented by the unit;
- how much learning has been achieved, represented by the size of the unit.

The relative significance of each of these factors may vary according to the context. For some purposes (entry to a philosophy degree course, for instance), the aggregate size of the units achieved at a given level may be more important than the detail of the learning outcomes within the units. For other purposes (for example the recruitment of an electrician by an employer), precisely which learning outcomes have been achieved will be of crucial importance, with the comparative level and extent of this achievement being of secondary interest.

The approach adopted by FEU allows for both these situations and any others which may arise. It does this through analysing all qualifications and awards into the units which they comprise and by describing these units in the following terms:

The definition of units of learning outcomes for assessment purposes must not be confused with the modularisation of learning programmes in order to provide greater flexibility in terms of delivery. (For detailed explanation see both *Framework Guidelines 2*, Section 4 and *Unitisation, Modularisation and Flexibility*)

Framework unit specification

Title

Learning outcomes

Assessment criteria

Level

Size

Credit value (based on the other features)

Mechanisms for ascribing size and level to units

The main sections of this publication address how to agree the level, size and credit value of a unit in a consistent way. This process is made much easier if all units' learning outcomes are clearly specified in a common way. *Framework Guidelines 2 : Learning Outcomes, Units and Modules* offers advice on this.

In order to ascribe a level and size to a unit , it has to be judged in terms of an set of agreed level descriptors and the notional learning time needed to achieve the learning outcomes.

It is important to emphasise that in ascribing size and level to a unit:

- in neither case is it a mechanistic exercise based on the written specification alone;
- the determination of size and level are closely linked.

The ascription of size and level to units should be carried out according to agreed quality assurance procedures. These are currently frequently implemented by Open College Networks (OCN) panels or college consortia both of which form professional **networks** which together with **exemplars**, ensure that the interpretation of the written learning outcomes, and the ascription of level and size, are sufficiently consistent.

Field-testing has shown that this combination of networks examining units with learning outcomes specified in an agreed manner, judged against written specifications for level and size, with access to exemplars as appropriate, enables the level and size of a unit to be ascribed with sufficient reliability for practical purposes.

Size and credit value

The size of a unit is expressed in terms of notional learning time in hours. In order to determine the credit value the size of the unit is divided by 30 hours.

Agreeing a credit value for a unit signifies that:

- the learning outcomes are properly specified
- the size and level are accepted

and that it is recognised by a defined group of users or institutions for defined purposes.

$$\text{Credit value} = \frac{\text{Size in notional learning time}}{\text{30 hours}}$$

For example:

Unit A (level 1 size 60 hours) = credit value 2 level 1

Unit B (level 2 size 90 hours) = credit value 3 level 2

Unit C (level 3 size 240 hours) = credit value 8 level 3

National qualifications and locally developed units

If in the future all qualifications were to share the features of the unit specifications and carry an indication of size and level many things would become more straightforward than they are at present. However in the current context various mechanisms will need to be adopted to ascribe a level and credit value to a unit or qualification depending on whether :

- the unit already exists as part of a national qualification (e.g National Vocational Qualifications,NVQs, Business and Technical Education Council, BTEC, etc.)
- the unit is derived from national qualifications which are not unitised at the design stage(e.g. non-modular A level)
- the unit has been specially written to cover achievements not currently recognised as part of national qualifications
- an overall credit value is required for a whole qualification (e.g. GCE A level, GNVQ, GCSE)

Each of these possibilities is addressed in turn below.

The unit already exists as part of a national qualification (e.g. NVQs, BTEC, etc)

In these cases the qualification as a whole may already have a designed level and size, but these characteristics will not usually have been ascribed to the component units. Therefore a group of practitioners, usually in the form of a consortium or panel needs to be formed in order to carry out the ascription. *Such a panel at this stage of development may be local but in the longer term these activities should be carried out at a national level.*

Panels will primarily be judging the size and level of the unit, rather than its coherence. However, difficulties can arise if it transpires in use that the learning outcomes of the unit are not defined clearly enough to determine its size and level. In such cases, proposals for refinement of the unit definition should be fed back to the appropriate national body for their consideration .

In general, new units should not be defined unilaterally, since this will not provide the student with the national recognition they require and will militate against the development of a coherent national system.

The unit is derived from national qualifications which are not unitised at the design stage and do not offer accreditation for partial completion (e.g. non-modular A level)

A college may take the decision to unitise in order to make what can be assessed more evident to learners, to allow their interim achievement to be recognised or for other purposes. In these cases institutions should take their units to consortia / panels to provide external checks.

Learners studying for an A level who do not complete the whole programme or who do not take the final qualification could in appropriate cases have their achievement recognised through OCN credits. (See Section 5 Award of credits.)

Type of unit /qualification	Mechanisms for ascription	Write units	Award of credits (By OCN / HE)
NVQ units, BTEC units	At present local consortia or panel. (In future national)	No	No
Derived from national qualification (e.g. non modular A level)	At present local consortia or panel. (In future national)	Yes	Possible
Non-accredited areas	Consortia or panel	Yes	Possible
Whole qualification	National CAT Network credit ratings	No	No

The unit has been specially written to cover achievements not currently recognised as part of national qualifications (e.g. non-accredited areas)

Where the learner's achievements cannot be recognised as part of a national qualification, it can be beneficial to both the learner and the provider to devise a unit locally, and to give it a credit value. A group of practitioners will consider the coherence of the unit, (title, learning outcomes and assessment criteria), will agree the level by reference to the level descriptors, and agree the size of the unit in terms of the notional learning time. Their judgement will be informed not only by the specifications and exemplar materials but crucially by their professional experience of learner achievement.

It would usually be beneficial to award learners credits for the achievement of these units through OCNs or college consortia arrangements.

A credit value is required for a whole qualification (e.g. GCSE, GNVQ, non-modular A level)

Credit ratings (estimated credit values) have been agreed for whole qualifications such as GNVQs, GCSEs and A levels by a number of institutions within FEU's National CAT network. It is because these qualifications and their unit components are not all expressed in terms of learning outcomes that they can only be regarded as estimates.

They have been agreed so that institutions using this approach for various applications can apply the ratings consistently one with another. However this is an interim measure taken for pragmatic reasons in anticipation of a common approach to unitisation becoming the norm for all qualifications.

FEU has continuing work in this area through **Credit Rating and National Qualifications** (RP 900)

Awarding credits

Learners' achievements may be formally recognised by the award either of a unit or a whole qualification by a national awarding body or (where the unit is locally derived and not covered by national qualifications) by the award of credits by an OCN or university. [1]

Therefore in the example used earlier, learners achieving these units would be awarded credits based on the credit value and level of the unit. Thus learners would receive for:

Unit A (credit value 2 level 1) 2 credits level 1

Unit B (credit value 3 level 2) 3 credits level 2

Unit C (credit value 8 level 3) 8 credits level 3.

Aggregation of credit values

Aggregation of achievements:

- can be beneficial for progression purposes for individual learners ;
- to assist with curriculum design, measurement of value added, internal resourcing, NTETS and publication of results.

In the former case, credit value may still be indicated in a transcript aggregating or describing the value and level of the units achieved and issued to the learner by the college (such an approach is now implemented in colleges throughout Wales). This would supplement but not replace the award of accredited units or whole qualifications by a national awarding body.

[1] At present only OCNs or universities award credits in the sense used here. OCNs cover achievement in post-16 institutions, universities in HE. These credit systems overlap at FEU/OCN level 3 HE CATS Level 0 and this urgently needs to be addressed.

Using aggregate credit value

Aggregate credit values, depending on the type of units or qualifications involved, can be derived from one or more of the following :

- the credit value
- the credit rating of a whole qualification or unit components
- actual credits awarded

Aggregate credit values can be used for various purposes:

To measure an individual learner's achievement over a two year part-time programme

1994 - 95	
Aggregate credit value	10 level 2 7 level 3
1995 - 96	
Aggregate credit value	5 level 2 15 level 3
1994 - 96	
Aggregate credit value	**15 level 2** **22 level 3**

Example 1

To measure total learner achievement, year on year, within a college or a department of a college:

Aggregate credit value of all qualifications and units achieved.

1993	1994	1995
3300 level E	4800 level E	5400 level E
4500 level 1	4500 level 1	4200 level 1
6000 level 2	6600 level 2	7100 level 2
3000 level 3	4200 level 3	4800 level 3

This example would give a general profile of the level of achievement within a department or college, and the changes in that profile over a number of years.

Example 2

SECTION 2 FRAMEWORK LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

Why levels for units ?

A Basis for Credit? established that levels are needed within the proposed framework in order to provide learners, practitioners and others with a straightforward way to differentiate achievement.

The paper suggested that the equivalencies offered in the White Paper *Education and Training in the Twenty-first Century* could be a starting point. Subsequent experience and publications however, including *Discussing Credit* (FEU 1993) and *Beyond A Basis for Credit?* (FEU consultation paper 1993) have shown that a set of level descriptors, referenced to units rather than to whole qualifications, is essential.

In order to give value to smaller parts of the curriculum or qualifications and to help with guidance, progression and transfer, users need to be able to compare units, one with another, based on the intrinsic content of the unit, and not on the qualification or programme of which they may form a part.

The level descriptors also question the unhelpful assumption that all units within a qualification or programme are at the same level, or that they need to be. For instance, the learning outcomes of a unit in basic word-processing are the same level whether they are part of the National Curriculum, an NVQ, an A-level programme or a degree. The Common Framework level descriptors are offered to help users make rational judgements about the level at which units are placed.

Number of levels pre-higher education

In order for the framework to be comprehensive it has to be accessible to all learners and types of learning and therefore needs to be sufficiently open-ended to cater for learners' achievement at basic levels.

The FHE Act 1992 identifies provision within the FE sectors at NVQ levels 1, 2 and 3 and their academic equivalent. It also identifies a level of provision prior to entry to NVQ level 1 (or equivalent). Therefore FEU proposes level descriptors at four levels prior to HE/advanced professional qualifications.

GNVQ	NVQ	COMMON FRAMEWORK	SCAA	NOCN	HE CATS
		E	NC	E	
1	1	1	NC/GCSE *(D-F)*	1	
2	2	2	NC/GCSE *(A-C)*	2	
3	3	3	A LEVEL	3	0
4	4	4			1
		5			2
		6			3
		7			M

Common framework level descriptors

Names for levels

The open-ended first level of the framework is called Entry level. The names chosen for the other three levels of the framework are the same as GNVQ/NVQ levels and consistent with academic equivalencies now used widely within the FE sector, in HE and in workplace training.

Though this choice of names achieves consistency in one sense, it must be stressed that units should be placed at a level according to the criteria embodied in the level descriptors and not on the basis of level of the programme or qualification according to NVQ equivalencies. Thus it is perfectly possible that a particular unit within a NVQ Level 2 qualification could be ascribed to level 1 on the basis of the framework level descriptors (although most units would be expected to be at level two.)

Provisional level descriptors

The level descriptors proposed here represent a deliberate attempt to draw out and synthesise the key words used to describe levels within the GCE A level, GNVQ, NVQ, and OCN traditions. They are proposed as a working solution.

In the course of development work carried out by FEU in collaboration with members of the FEU CAT Network, these level descriptors have been accepted as both pragmatic and robust enough to meet current needs. They can be interpreted consistently by experienced practitioners, even if they are only relative descriptors and not absolute in any sense. It is recognised that they may need refinement and modification in the light of experience, and further development work by FEU.

While it is clear these do not indicate precise boundaries, consensus can be reached about their operation through the use of networking. They are also learning outcomes (albeit very general ones).

LEVEL	DESCRIPTOR
Entry	The acquisition of a limited range of basic competences , knowledge and understanding in highly structured self-referenced contexts.
One	The acquisition of a foundation of competences, knowledge and understanding in a limited range of predictable and structured contexts.
Two	The acquisition of a broader range of competences, knowledge and understanding which demonstrate the extension of previous abilities in less predictable and structured contexts.
Three	The acquisition of a more complex range of competences, knowledge and understanding in contexts which develop autonomous, analytical and critical abilities.

PROGRESSIVE STRANDS

Within this set of level descriptors there are three progressive strands which are used to distinguish one level from another.

Complexity	An increasing level of complexity in the skills, knowledge and understanding that learners are expected to acquire.
Autonomy	An increasing level of learner autonomy in the acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding.
Range	An increasing range of contexts in which learners are expected to use the skills, knowledge and understanding they have acquired.

These strands are not hierarchical in relation to each other nor is it necessary for any one unit to contain all three strands at the same level. Thus a high degree of complexity will not necessarily be associated with a high degree of learner autonomy.

National Curriculum Key Stages

Level descriptors E, 1 and 2 cover achievements at Key Stages 1- 4 of the National Curriculum. It is therefore possible to ascribe GNVQ and GCSE units to a level. This could assist the development of seamless pathways into tertiary education for learners post 14 by showing the relationship between achievement within the national curriculum and post-16 qualifications. It could help prevent Key Stage 4 from being seen as merely the final stage of secondary education and raise its profile as a preparatory step contributing to learners' further and higher education. For further discussion of this, see *A Framework for Credit* Section 1 (FEU 1995)

Beyond Level 3 and HE CATS

FE colleges provide learning opportunities and qualifications beyond level 3 such as Higher National Certificate and Diploma qualifications, Professional Qualifications, Foundation programmes and full HE degrees through franchising arrangements.. They are also involved in Access arrangements and other progression agreements which straddle the FE-HE boundary. The framework therefore needs to be extended to cover higher levels of both academic and professional achievement and in particular the interface between level 3 and HE/professional qualifications.

Choosing to Change (HEQC 1994) recommends the establishment of a single national credit framework encompassing both further and higher education. It also suggests that the FEU framework proposals would provide a more robust underpinning for a national framework than the CNAA CAT Scheme which is currently in widespread use within HE.

It is hoped that further work will be done by FEU and its successor body, in collaboration with relevant organisations, to extend the descriptors to encompass all levels of achievement within post-14 education and training.

SECTION 3 ASCRIBING LEVEL TO A UNIT

Ascribing level

The statement of the learning outcomes of a unit (unit title, learning outcomes and assessment criteria) is needed for a group of experienced practitioners to ascribe to it a level. This process also involves the use of exemplar materials and networking. (see Section 1 pp8).

Level is determined by :

- the content, i.e. the structure and learning demands of the chosen knowledge, skills and understanding required;
- statements which quantify and qualify the content.

Learning outcomes, and in particular their associated assessment criteria, include qualitative and/or quantitative statements which contribute to the determination of the level. Such statements only make sense when related to the context of the learning outcome or assessment criteria. For example, words and phrases such as analyse, evaluate, synthesise will appear in units at a range of levels.[2] Some qualitative phrases used in practice in distinguishing the level of achievement are illustrated below.

The use of the progressive strands

Some learning outcome statements are concerned with the increasing complexity of the knowledge or skill to be achieved, some are concerned with increasing autonomy, and some with range. Some are concerned with more than one of these strands.The three strands are illustrated below.

Complexity

In relation to **increasing complexity** for example the following phrases are used:

Level 2		*Level 3*
demonstrates **basic** understanding	becomes	demonstrates **detailed and explicit** understanding
carry out simple tasks	becomes	carry out **complex** tasks
draws conclusions **mostly**	becomes	consistent with data

Autonomy

In relation to increasing autonomy of achievement the following phrases are used:

Level 2		*Level 3*
carry out with **some support**	becomes	carry out **without support**
respond using a **given format**	becomes	respond using an **appropriate format**
supports **team effort**	becomes	offers **analytical leadership**

Range

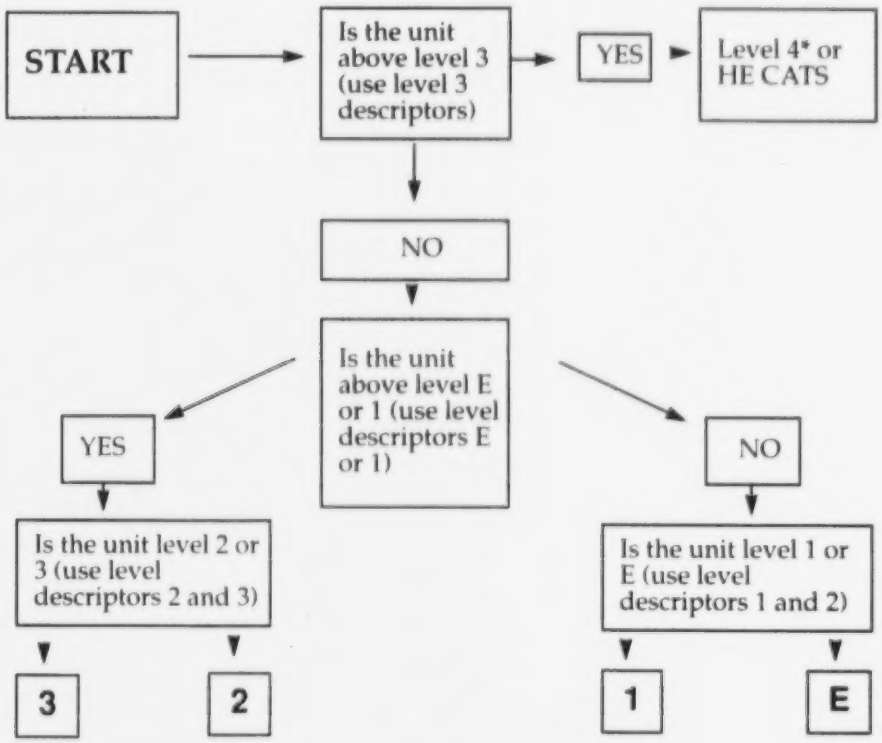
In relation to **range** for example the following phrases are used :

Level 2		*Level 3*
takes data from a **limited range**	becomes	takes data from a **wide range** of sources
applies in **particular context**	becomes	applies in **various contexts**
can service **named appliance**	becomes	can service **range of appliances**

[2] Note R. Winter 'The problem of educational levels part 2' *Journal of Further and Higher education* Vol.18, No.1, 1994

Levels and decision making

In order to determine the level of a unit it may be helpful to users of the framework to use the four stage process offered below.


START
Is the unit above level 3 (use level 3 descriptors)
YES
Level 4* or HE CATS
NO
Is the unit above level E or 1 (use level descriptors E or 1)
YES
NO
Is the unit level 2 or 3 (use level descriptors 2 and 3)
Is the unit level 1 or E (use level descriptors 1 and 2)
3
2
1
E

** under consideration*

Ascribing level to units in this way should make the choices and decisions relatively straightforward. At each point at which a decision about level is made there needs to be reference to some or all of the following :

- the level descriptors
- the progressive strands
- exemplars
- professional opinion informed by contacts and networks

SECTION 4 ASCRIBING SIZE AND CREDIT VALUE TO A UNIT

The use of size

Size is used in order to indicate the amount of achievement within a unit. This allows comparisons to be made between units.

FEU recognises that the significance of this measure will vary according to purpose. As explained in Section 1, for some purposes size is of little significance, and for others it is most important.

The use of notional time

Notional learning time has been found to be the most practical way of measuring the amount or size of achievement. The design of most qualifications and learning programmes is underpinned by implicit, if not explicit, assumptions about what can be achieved within a certain amount of time. This is true of GCSE, A levels, GNVQs, BTEC qualifications, degrees- the only exception may be NVQs. It is also true of most qualifications and credit systems worldwide.

Fuller discussion of the efficacy of notional time is available in *A Basis for Credit* (FEU 1992), *A Basis for Credit - Feedback and Developments* (FEU 1993), *Discussing Credit* (FEU 1993), *Beyond A Basis for Credit* (FEU CAT Network consultation paper 1993)

Ascribing size to a unit

A unit may be of any size. In exceptional cases it may be that the coherence of the subject/vocational area can only be ensured if the unit is very large.

A size is ascribed to a unit by agreeing the amount of notional learning time (including teacher contact and independent study) required, on average, for a learner to achieve the learning outcomes of the unit. In order to do this reference needs to be made not only to the learning outcomes and assessment criteria but to exemplars discussed by groups of practitioners. (See also *Framework Guidelines 1:* Introduction and *Framework Guidelines 2:* Section 3.)

Agreeing the credit value

A unit is given a credit value of 1 for 30 notional hours of learning activity; a credit value of 2 for 60 notional hours; a credit value of 3 for 90 notional hours, and so on. Rounding the notional time up or down, to give unitary values, may occasionally prove necessary and is consistent with the pragmatic approach on which the framework is based.

In order to establish the credit value of a unit the following formula should therefore be used.

$$\frac{\text{Notional learning time}}{\text{30 hours}} = \text{Credit value of unit}$$

Once the credit value of the unit is agreed the actual amount of time the individual learner spends in achieving the learning outcomes is not relevant unless there is consistent divergence between notional learning time and actual learning time.

See also 'Introduction : Size and Credit Value' (p.8) and *A Framework for Credit Section 2 :* Credit Value and the Award of Credits.

The choice of 30 hours

Using the figure of thirty hours for determining the credit value of a unit has been extensively debated. It remains the preferred figure because it meets the important criteria that it is both:

- small enough to be flexible, and
- large enough to be assessable and accreditable.

Experience shows a smaller number of hours increases the likelihood of inconsistency and disagreement over the size and credit value of units. FEU does recognise however, that other figures are in use and that there are some practical considerations which need to be taken into account. Two issues stand out:

- whether a lower figure, for example ten hours, would offer more flexibility;
- whether in order to encourage a single framework for FE and HE alignment with the 7.5 hours used by the CNAA CAT System should be adopted.

To date the figure of 30 hours has proved to be useful in FE colleges, adult education and some HE institutions. It is also supported as the best figure for the unit of credit in the HEQC report *Choosing to Change* (HEQC 1994) and in *Towards a Credit Framework* (University of Cambridge, Board of Continuing Education 1994).

SECTION 5 AWARDING CREDITS

Who awards credits

Achievement of units which have been ascribed a level, size, or credit value does not lead to the award of credits unless a credit awarding body, such as an OCN or an HE institution is involved, to provide additional external quality assurance through institutional recognition, assessment, verification and moderation.

While it is theoretically feasible for FE institutions to award their own credits these are unlikely to have much currency and carry the danger of distracting learners from nationally recognised qualifications and units based on national standards.

For the most part, learners in FE will want to accumulate and transfer national qualifications, and their unit components, and will be awarded credits only in areas which are not adequately covered by these.

Credits should only be awarded by organisations which are in a legitimate position to do so, i.e. OCNs, FHE Consortia and Universities.

Criteria for awarding credits

Credit-awarding bodies should only award credits to learners for the achievement of units if the following criteria have been met :

- the learning outcomes have been checked for coherence and clarity;
- the unit has been ascribed a level and a size;
- assessment procedures are quality assured;
- the area is not covered adequately by national qualifications;
- unit certification is not available within national qualifications.

A learner should be awarded credits for the achievement of a unit based on its size and level. Thus following the example used throughout this paper :

Unit	Size/level	Award of credits
Unit A	Size 60 hours level 1	2 credits at level 1
Unit B	Size 90 hours level 2	3 credits at level 2
Unit C	Size 240 hours level 3	8 credits at level 3

Further Development

Credits could be reported on records of achievement or credit transcripts. Used alongside credit ratings for national qualifications and their unit components achievement in various contexts could be expressed in terms of a single aggregate credit value.

In the future, if agreement is reached at a national level, that NVQs, GNVQs, GCSE A levels and their unit components could be all be ascribed a credit value, it would be possible for learners to be awarded qualifications and credits simultaneously, and for the credit transcript to report on all achievements in the same way.

It would also be possible for new national post-16 certificates and diplomas to be expressed in terms of credits. (See also *A Framework for Credit* FEU 1995.).

Key FEU publications

A Basis for Credit? 1992

A Basis for Credit — feedback and developments 1993

Assessment issues and problems in a criterion-based system 1993

Discussing credit 1993

A National Credit Framework: Curriculum Information Series briefing note 1993

The Catalyst No. 1,2 and 3 1993/4

Framework Guidelines 1: Units, Credit Value and the Award of Credits 1995

Framework Guidelines 2: Learning Outcomes, Units and Modules (forthcoming 1995)

Unitisation, modularisation and flexibility: a credit-based approach (forthcoming 1995)